

Welcome to our new look Update! We are thrilled to be using our new visual identity for the first time. We believe it perfectly represents the breadth of the Commission's remit.



ing of the Commission in Oxford, and about the imminent launch of the

# An Oxford focus on young people

The sun shone brightly on Monday 20 September when the Commission met for its third in person session in the welcoming surroundings of St Edmund Hall.

The previous evening some Commissioners participated in a Zoom conversation with a group of young people from a church in Eynsham. The engaging youth spoke with great clarity, thoughtfulness and honesty about their understanding of family, their expectations for family in their future lives, and what they think that the Church could do better to support their relationships. The young people stressed the importance of the church being welcoming of everyone wherever they come from and irrespective of their background.

This was a rich and fruitful conversation which highlighted the important role that a church youth group can play in providing a faith-based ‘family’ for young people, not all of whom come from a faith-based background, and instilling key values which will shape the way they live their lives. They reminded us that our experience of ‘family’ changes as we grow up, move into the world, and grow older. This was a fulfilling conversation in which the voices of young people were paramount, and provides a blueprint for future conversations with young people over the coming months as the Commission meets around the country.

Over breakfast the next morning, some Commissioners and members of the secretariat met with members of the Diocese of Oxford to talk about the various work they are undertaking with young people and their work within schools. They stressed the importance of church leaders being ‘rooted’ within their local communities and being known within local schools. The aim is to establish discipleship and support people in their everyday lives. Commissioners asked a number of questions about how the Diocese is supporting young people who may feel marginalised or ‘different’, and work that is supporting families and couple relationships.

After the breakfast meeting, the full Commission began its main meeting with a time of contemplative prayer led by members of the Diocese of Oxford who then talked about the issues young people are facing and the work they are doing in support of young people, families and households. The Diocese is spread across four English counties (Oxford, Dorchester, Buckingham and Reading areas), and focuses its ministry on the “Growing Faith” triangle of church, school and households. Commissioners heard about the work with young people during lockdown and some of the challenges young people are facing as the country emerges from the pandemic.

The Commission was introduced to [the contemplative toolkit developed by the Diocese and the Diocesan Board of Education, “Space Makers”](#), which is being used in schools as the Church’s distinctive response to the acute mental health needs of the pupils. Accessible to pupils of all faiths and none, and different worldviews, five contemplative practices – Stilling, Noticing, Dwelling, Mending and Blessing – help schools to embrace some of the ancient wisdom of the Christian tradition and, in doing so, assist children to navigate the world around them. An additional

resource is being developed by the Diocese for use with families.

## Call for Evidence and Work Planning

During their meeting in Oxford the Commissioners were updated about the Call for Evidence which will be shared with a wide range of stakeholders within the Church of England and other faith groups, and more widely within the community. There will be two Calls for Evidence – the first will be aimed at those aged 18 and over, with a separate one aimed at young people a little later this year.

We are aiming to get the first Call for Evidence out to stakeholders within the next week – please look out for an email from us and keep an eye on this website. You will see that we are keen to hear from as many people as possible, and would ask you to send on the information you receive and the Call for Evidence as widely as you can.

The Chair and the Co-Chair described the activities which would take place during the remainder of 2021, which will include focus groups and taking evidence from key individuals and organisations, and reminded Commissioners of the meeting dates for 2022. They also reported on a number of conversations they have had with different faith leaders, all of whom have been enthusiastic about being involved in the work of the Commission.

The members of the four work streams updated the Commission on their work and their plans for the next period.

The Commission will meet next in York in November, when we hope to be able to see a first cut of the Call for Evidence responses, and meet with people locally, including Archbishop Stephen Cottrell. In the meantime the Commissioners will be meeting with the Expert Advisers to the four work streams and planning their evidence gathering activities.

## Learning from Social History

In the afternoon, one of the Commissioners, Dr Sarah Williams, led a discussion about the questions that the Commission might need to explore within the Social History work stream. This prompted a lively exchange of ideas and resulted in a list of key questions which Sarah and Professor Kwame Akuffo will be investigating in their work stream. Sarah quoted from a range of sources throughout history who had proclaimed their views about families and family life, many of which indicate the different ways in which families have been regarded and varying expectations of family life across the centuries. Social history is assisting the Commission to understand the changes in family life and the influences that shape our expectations today.

# Reflections

Towards the end of the meeting, one of the Commissioners, Dr Elaine Storkey reflected on the ways in which the Commission had been listening and hearing the voices of others throughout the day.

Dez Brown led the Commission in prayer to close the meeting.

## Keeping in touch

[Read a blog from Professor Kwame Akuffo](#), and [a report on the Commission's visit in September to Newham](#). The next blog will be from Dr Sarah Williams.

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